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*Deities and Mythology*

The Trumaí were certainly not preoccupied with the supernatural. Quain makes no mention of the spirit owners of animal, plant, and fish species that figure so prominently in the Kamayurá belief system, nor does he speak of the "*ole* spirits" attributed to the Trumaí by Oberg.[8] Beliefs, which are a more covert part of culture, are particularly difficult for an ethnographer who lacks familiarity with the language to learn about, and it is understandable that Quain's notes are weak on this point.

Magic, except for sorcery, was not observed by Quain, unless shamanistic curing is considered a magical practice. No objects, such as charms or amulets, were thought to have a magical effect, and the already discarded ceremonial objects were the only inanimate items that could be said to have some inherent religious value. In short, the day-to-day world of the Trumaí was little influenced by extra-corporeal forces or personages. The deities were nearly all culture heroes and creators, who did their work in the dim past of the "grandfathers of all the Trumaí."

With some variation the mythology of the Trumaí was quite similar to that of the Kamayurá. The most important of the Trumaí creation deities was Sun (Atehle). This was not the visible, celestial sun. The Trumaí explained that the celestial sun was only the *aton* (pet) of the real Sun, who was important in all the creation myths. Sun no longer actively intervened in life, but in the days of the creation he was an anthropomorphic personage having great supernatural powers. Sun's mother was the wife of Panther (Fetde), who appears in the tales of the after life. This woman, in turn, was the daughter of Wamutsini, or Grandfather. The latter had an important part in the creation, for he was the original deity from whom the other supernaturals sprang. Wamutsini's daughter was not important in these stories.

The identity and character of Moon were ill-defined. At one time Moon was in the heavens with Sun, who, however, became angry with him and cast him out to his present isolated position. Moon was once eaten by Awalanaxe, a fish. Sun, upon learning of this, made a fishhook, caught Awalanaxe, and disembowelled him. Moon was found inside quite chewed up, but Sun molded him back into shape. A fly then crawled up the nostril of the unconscious Moon causing him to sneeze. He thought that he had merely been asleep, but Sun explained that he had been eaten.

Moon's sex was highly ambivalent, being a male in some tales and a female in others. He was not, however, important as a creator. Awalanaxe appeared frequently in the mythology as did Wakpanehene, another fish.

[8] Oberg 1953, p. 54.

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Crow appeared as a trickster and, although not a creator deity, managed to bring forth new things in the process of his machinations. Waniwani, the name of an abandoned Trumaí village site, was also a village in the heavens — the home of a mythical person of the same name. Jemenary, Kelenewary, and Nane were three other mythological characters. The second was the sister's son (*deta*) of the first, and an inveterate trickster. Although they appear in a Trumaí tale of mythological times, they had no part in the creative process.

Rain (Ka'wixu) was apparently the only Trumaí deity capable of interfering with the world in its present form. Although he appeared as a character in the mythology, he was also believed to be the active agent behind rains and storms. The Trumaí were extremely frightened of thunder and lightning, and thought storms to be the result of someone's having antagonized Rain. During a violent equinoctial thunder storm, Aloari came rushing into Quain's house, imploring him to turn out his light and stop working as he was angering Rain. Despite their fear of displeasing Rain, the Trumaí on a few occasions tried to drive away the clouds. One man blew at the clouds to push them back, while Quain was told to fire his rifle to frighten Rain away.

There was also a class of malignant beings that were important as omens. The Trumaí could not look at a snake called *lesilesi*, seemingly the rattlesnake. Aloari said that shortly after he saw one, two of his brothers died. Jakwalu saw one while she was harvesting manioc in the garden, and it was generally believed that for this reason she would not live long. Quain was uncertain whether this was the immediate result of seeing the snake, or whether the snake was an omen that the Kamayurá were practicing witchcraft on her. Similarly, anyone seeing the *le*, a bird with a red forehead, would die. And finally there were sirens inhabiting the woods to the northeast of the Trumaí village. Their call exerted an attraction, and anyone seeing them or cohabiting with them would surely die. These women had long hair, wore bark cloth pubic coverings, and did not depilate. Significantly, the direction of their abode and their appearance correspond to those of Suyá women. Omens, such as cloud formations and canine howls, indicate the imminence of an enemy attack.

### *The Origin of Things*

Most of the Trumaí mythology is devoted to explaining the origin of the natural world, people, and culture. The chief creator deities are Sun and Wamutsini.

In the beginning there was only Wamutsini. His origin is not explained, and he is probably thought to have always existed. He made daughters out of wood. One of them married Panther, who lived in the

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773 gather some vegetable dye in a tree in which he had put a snake. The wily nephew made designs on his leg with the dye which caused the snake to fall out of the tree. He returned home and resumed his relations with his uncle's wife.

Jemenary then ordered Kelenewary to cross a river in which there was a fish that would surely eat him. The nephew suffered some bites, but these he cured by smearing with another vegetable dye. The infuriated uncle then sent him to the village of Rain, Kelenewary's cross-cousin, to get a highly prized wood which Rain guarded closely. Kelenewary arrived at Rain's village and repeatedly urged Rain to have sexual intercourse with his wife. After many wakeful nights, the couple, exhausted, fell into deep sleep. Kelenewary stole the wood, and returned to his uncle's house, where he continued to sleep with his uncle's wife.

Later, when the two men were building an eagle cage, Kelenewary, who was sitting on top of it, angered his uncle by saying that the eagle was no larger than one of his wife's pubic hairs. The enraged Jemenary released the vertical poles in the framework of the structure, catapulting the insolent nephew through the air and into the branches of a tree. Kelenewary was hurt, and Nane, a creature having a human form but capable of flying, carried him to his village. Under Nane's care, he drank medicines that restored him to health and caused him to grow to a tremendous size. The uncle, in despair, created the deer with the intention of having it kill his nephew. Kelenewary, however, lassoed the animal with his armband, and it killed the uncle instead. The opposition thus removed, the nephew returned to the embraces of his dead uncle's wife.

## *Lore and Learning*

821 [775] The cosmology of the Trumaí was not very elaborate. Many stars and constellations were known and named. As noted above, the Milky Way entered into their beliefs of an after-life. Special attention was also given to the Hesperides, which may be the constellation that dates their ceremonial season at the end of the rains. Quain was told by Thomas Young, the missionary, that the planting time was determined by astral phenomena. Quain was not able to confirm this, but he noted that the Trumaí knew the proper time for burning the felled brush. This knowledge was important as the rains arrive suddenly, and once the brush becomes wet it is almost impossible to fire.

[241] [805]

805 824 825 Flora and fauna also served as markers of seasonal passage. One such sign was an insect that issued a shrill and pleasant whistle from dusk until far into the night in the weeks immediately preceding the rainy season.

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It was Quain's good fortune that a lunar eclipse occurred while he was still in the company of the Trumaí who were escorting him back to civilization. On about November 7, 1938, the moon eclipsed shortly after it rose. When it was first noticed, one man asked Quain to fire his gun. Another danced and shot a burning arrow at the moon. 921 789

The eclipse lasted for more than an hour, and during this time the Indians refused to proceed further. It was necessary to frighten away whatever was eating the moon. To right the disturbance of the natural harmony, Maibu drew himself up to his full stature and addressed the moon at great length. All the tribes in the area, Quain was told, were taking similar measures.

The eclipse was thought to be a harbinger of evil. One man decided to return home in the belief that now the white men would kill him. Yati, who had an infected hand, was sad because Matiwana, his father, would think by this sign that he, Yati, had been "killed" by Mehinaku witchcraft. As Yati's hand grew worse, the rest of the party began to believe that the eclipse was caused by old Matiwana's tears. [787]

Seasons were recognized as "sunny times" and "rainy times," and the number of moons and their phases were used as time-markers. Long periods were reckoned as "when my father was small" or "when I was a boy;" short periods by adding up the passing nights. This latter method was ineffectual for anything after ten days, as ten marked the upper limit of Trumaí counting. 805 [802]

Enumeration of objects was shown by holding up the appropriate combination of fingers. There were words for the numbers one through ten, but ten also signified "a great many." Large quantities could be expressed by gesture as well. When Maibu wanted to indicate many *beiɟá*, he held up his hand to their height when stacked. 802